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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. STADTHAGEN (Nicaragua)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Stadthagen (Nicaragua), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/50/113 and Add.1, A/50/254-S/1995/501, A/50/345, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/475, A/50/518)

(a) TRIENNIAL POLICY REVIEW OF OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (continued) (A/50/202-E/1995/76 and Add.1, Add.2 and Add.3)

1. Mr. PANTIRU (Republic of Moldova) said that, like other newly independent States the Republic of Moldova was engaged in the difficult process of transition to democracy and a market economy. In its opinion, the success of that process would depend largely on a positive external environment and strong support from the international community. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was the core of the system of operational activities, had provided assistance in such crucial areas as national capacity-building in management, governance and democratization, private sector development and economic reforms, human resources, the social sector and the development of environmentally sound energy sources. UNDP also had played an important role in coordination with other specialized agencies as well as multilateral and bilateral donors, and its Executive Board had recently adopted a number of important decisions concerning technical cooperation, in addition to special assistance to some newly independent States.

2. The efficiency, effectiveness and impact of development cooperation and operational activities depended largely on a country's ability to manage the process and integrate external assistance into the national context. The United Nations system should be helping countries to strengthen their key national institutions and aid coordination capacity. Thus, the effort to synchronize the programming cycles of international organizations with national development programmes was especially welcome. In order to eliminate the problems encountered in the national execution mentioned in document A/50/113, the respective roles of Governments, UNDP and specialized agencies must be clearly delineated. His delegation agreed that the regional commissions could play a more visible role in the process of preparing country programmes and in national execution. Government personnel involved in project implementation must also receive adequate professional training.

3. Mr. TALBOT (Guyana) said that his Government viewed the operational activities of the United Nations system as an important catalyst to its national development efforts. Guyana had received very important assistance through several funds and programmes, and also from the donors who had continued their support to those programmes. Future funding of operational activities must, however, be placed on a more reliable and predictable basis.

4. Harmonization and simplification of rules and procedures, national execution and capacity-building were the three most important aspects of the

triennial comprehensive policy review. While rules and procedures were certainly needed, it would be helpful if they were harmonized and simplified. Regarding national execution, he said that flexibility and responsiveness to national conditions was needed in order to foster true national self-reliance. The more broad-based approach to capacity-building adopted throughout the United Nations system, including at the community level, should be encouraged.

5. In closing, he said that Guyana had taken steps to exploit fully the enormous potential of South-South cooperation. With UNDP funding, his Government had initiated its first umbrella project in support of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), and would host the first sectoral review meeting on food and agriculture of the Group of 77.

6. Mr. PRENDERGAST (Jamaica) said that the triennial review was of considerable importance, as it afforded an opportunity to assess the activities of the United Nations system in order to ensure that it remained responsive to the needs of developing countries. His delegation welcomed the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in document A/50/202, particularly those regarding the role of the Economic and Social Council, dialogue at the country level, the resident coordinator system, the country strategy note, national execution and resource allocation.

7. The central role of recipient countries and national Governments in the management of their own development must be underscored. The programming of operational activities should continue to be based on national development plans and priorities. In that context, the resident coordinator system must continue to operate within institutional restrictions, in order not to compromise relationships between individual organizations of the United Nations system and Governments. The steps taken to make it more responsive to needs at the country level were welcome. The country strategy note was a major step towards achieving conceptual and operational coherence at the country level, although its elaboration did require a period of preparation in order to ensure broad participation. Cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions should not lead to new conditionalities.

8. His delegation noted with concern the decline in official development assistance. While the demand for operational activities had expanded, programmable central resources had declined. Jamaica, therefore, supported recommendation 6 of the Secretary-General's report (A/50/202) which called for the re-energizing of negotiations on a new, improved funding system in accordance with resolution 48/162, which had called for a substantial increase in funding required for operational activities on a predictable, continuous and assured basis.

9. Mr. DANESH-YAZDI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the international community must take advantage of the improved environment resulting from the end of the cold war, and address the crucial issues of social and economic development. The operational activities of the United Nations were extremely valuable in promoting the self-reliance of developing countries. In order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations development system, it was essential that the developed countries should achieve the targets set for official development assistance, and provide new and additional

resources as they had pledged to do. With regard to the issue of restructuring, he said that while special attention should be accorded to General Assembly resolution 48/162, the new tasks entrusted to the various funds and programmes must be consirtent with the original mandates.

10. Concerning recommendations 11 to 14 of document A/50/202, national programmes and priorities constituted the only viable frame of reference for operational activities and thus, for the formulation of the country strategy note. The authority of the resident coordinator system should not exceed the limits defined in the General Assembly resolutions.

11. The developing countries had demonstrated their support of more efficient and effective operational activities by establishing cost-sharing arrangements and contributing to the expenses of local field offices, among other measures. In order to enhance operational activities for development, it was essential that others should now demonstrate political will on funding issues.

12. Mr. MURIITHI (Kenya) said that his country deeply appreciated the assistance it received from various United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies in support of operational activities. Given the importance of capacity-building in facilitating the effective integration of external assistance into the development process, his delegation agreed with recommendation 21 in document A/50/202 that capacity-building should continue to be an essential part of the operational activities of the United Nations system at the country level.

13. New approaches and improved funding mechanisms were needed to ensure that the funding commitments agreed upon at various international conferences were fulfilled, taking into account the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 48/162 on the need to increase resources for operational activities.

14. The effectiveness and efficiency of the resident coordinator system required a coordinated multidisciplinary approach to the needs of recipient countries while bearing in mind the need for a division of labour within the respective spheres of competence of the individual funds, programmes and specialized agencies. That approach would go a long way towards strengthening programme delivery. It also was necessary further to decentralize the administrative and financial aspects of the system to allow timely intervention by the resident coordinator. The importance of recommendation 9 concerning enhancement of the authority of the resident coordinator for the coordination of programmes and of recommendation 8, concerning the need for supplementary resources, either financial or in kind, for the resident coordinator system, could not be overemphasized. The recommendation calling for increased resources to implement programmes or projects contained in country strategy notes was timely. The targets outlined in those notes should be quantifiable in order to facilitate effective follow-up. The programme approach should be flexible so as to accord national projects priority when that was deemed desirable by the country concerned.

15. It was gratifying to note that national execution had increased significantly since the preceding triennial comprehensive policy review and that the other Joint Consultative Group on Policy agencies already employed national

execution extensively. A coherent expansion of national execution could be expected if the weaknesses in the modality were effectively addressed. In that connection, it was essential to implement recommendation 16, calling for more effective and systematic support by the specialized agencies to UNDP-funded projects.

16. Mr. DORANI (Djibouti) expressed his delegation's high regard for national execution and the programme approach and emphasized that resident coordinators should function both as cautious ambassadors of the United Nations and as technical experts, and should work in close partnership with Governments. UNDP had demonstrated that it was a dynamic entity capable of adapting to circumstances. That was illustrated by various of its activities under way or about to be undertaken within the context of the maintenance of peace and security, national reconciliation and reconstruction. His delegation welcomed the fact that the resident coordinator system had been extended to other bodies.

17. Given the current financial crisis and the apparent proliferation of well financed non-governmental organizations, the value of whose activities was not always clear, it would be prudent for donors to shift some of the funds provided to those organizations to bodies with demonstrated operational experience, such as UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA.

18. Lastly, the draft resolution on operational activities for development should include a tribute to all persons who, for more than 10 years, had discharged their tasks often at considerable risk to themselves.

19. Mr. ELTINAY (Sudan) said that at a time when official development assistance continued to decline the United Nations system represented the only hope for the developing countries in their quest to achieve sustainable development. The major donors must honour their obligations in order to enable the Organization to play its role as envisaged in the Charter. It was significant that in 1994 extrabudgetary contributions to UNDP by developing countries had demonstrated a new trend towards self-financing. It was disturbing to see that resources for the sixth UNDP programming cycle were declining, following a substantial decrease in indicative planning figures.

20. His delegation wished to pay a tribute to the objective role played by resident coordinators in assisting Governments to prepare country strategy notes and in coordinating the activities of the United Nations system at the country level. In particular, it welcomed the leading role of UNDP in that regard. It was important to emphasize that country strategy notes were the sole responsibility of Governments and must reflect their national priorities. The capacity-building activities of the United Nations should draw, in particular, on national expertise in the recipient countries.

21. Although his delegation commended the Secretary-General for his efforts in preparing the reports on the operational activities of the United Nations system in the field of development, those reports were misleading because they combined humanitarian relief with development activities. The explanations in paragraphs 11 of both document A/50/202/Add.1 and A/50/202/Add.2, for 1994 and 1993, respectively, were unacceptable to his delegation. Tables B.2 in the two

documents incorrectly represented the assistance provided to Operation Lifeline Sudan by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as development grants. In fact, as could be seen from tables B.3 of both reports, the International Development Association, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation had not provided any assistance to his country in 1993 and 1994. WFP and UNICEF had, it was true, provided very limited rehabilitation and development assistance to Operation Lifeline Sudan. His delegation requested a breakdown of the humanitarian assistance provided to the Sudan as reflected in the tables to which he had referred, and also requested that the confusion be corrected.

22. Mr. WIBISONO (Indonesia) said that the formidable challenges facing the United Nations could be overcome only through a genuine global partnership, which must be reflected in the operational activities of the Organization. In order to prevent the continued decline in resources available for development programmes, consultations on the new modalities for the financing of operational activities must be backed by the requisite political will. His delegation attached great importance to recommendations 6 and 7 in document A/50/202 in that connection.

23. The triennial review of operational activities for development had assumed added importance due to the rising demands not only in traditional operational activities, but also in new and upstream areas, which went far beyond available resources. Although conditions within a given country might require certain types of assistance, it should not be assumed that the same kind of assistance was required by all countries. Operational activities should focus primarily on those areas which had demonstrated their importance and success, including the client-oriented approach, which should be facilitated by the country strategy note. National self-reliance should be encouraged, as should national execution. His delegation fully supported recommendation 16 in document A/50/202 in that regard.

24. His delegation continued to support the resident coordinator system but urged caution with regard to recommendation 9 which called for enhanced responsibility and authority of the resident coordinator for the planning and coordination of programmes. The resident coordinator should assist Governments to achieve their development goals, inter alia, through the country strategy note. It might, perhaps, be too early to conclude that the mandate and role of the resident coordinator should be strengthened. In the interests of increased savings and the successful implementation of the operational activities of the United Nations system, and given the fact that the outcome thus far had fallen short of expectations, his delegation attached great importance to the ongoing efforts of resident coordinators to ensure closer involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions in operational activities, in particular at the field level. He therefore urged the vigorous pursuit of recommendations 24 and 25.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.